

The Creed

During our worship service, we gather together as a community with the prelude, the welcome & announcements, the Confession & Forgiveness, the Apostolic Greeting from the pastor, the Kyrie, and the Hymn of Praise. We then have a formal dialogue with the Word of God by first praying the Prayer of the Day, having the Children's Sermon, reading the First Reading and responding to by praying a Psalm, reading the Second Reading and responding to it by singing the Alleluia Verse, by honoring Christ in hearing the Gospel reading and responding by praising Christ and singing the Alleluia Verse again, by hearing the Sermon, and responding to the Word by singing the Hymn of the Day. Now that we have received the Word of God, we are ready as a Christian community to live in response to it. And we begin by responding together as a community before we leave to live according to the Word in our own individual ways in our daily lives.

The first thing we are called to do is share the Word of God with others. We begin doing this together as a community by confessing an ancient Creed of the Church together. And then when we leave the service, we share the Word with others in our own words.

In the Lutheran Church, we confess three creeds: the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

In worship, we confess the Apostles Creed during Advent and Lent, as well as on non-festival Sundays. We confess the Nicene Creed on high feast days like the Christmas season and the Easter season. And if we confess the Athanasian Creed during worship, it would be on Holy Trinity Sunday.

History of the Apostles Creed:

The Apostles Creed was developed on the grassroots level in churches in the early 100's AD. During this time, the church was under attack from both outside and within. In 98 AD, the Roman emperor Domitian made it a law that everybody in the Roman Empire was to show their patriotism by worshiping the new national gods of Rome – the spirits of all of the previous Roman emperors. Anyone who refused to do so would be tortured and executed as a traitor to the Empire. So Christians who refused to do so because of their faith in the one God in Christ Jesus were hunted down and persecuted at this time.

Also during this time, the majority of people converting to Christianity were Gentiles who had no association with the Jewish tradition. Many Gentile Christians were suspicious of Jews and of Christians who come from Jewish traditions. Conspiracy theories about how the true gospel teachings were hid by the Jews proliferated and new Gospels and Epistles appeared that were claimed to be written by the apostles that insisted that Jesus never died on the cross, or that Jesus wasn't really a human being but a spirit who appeared human.

Churches that were founded by the apostles and whose founding members were Jews upheld Gospels and Epistles that followed the teachings of the apostles: that Jesus did die on the cross and was physically raised from the dead and that Jesus really was a human being. In these apostolic churches, a creed was developed for new members to know what the apostolic teachings truly are to help them discern what Gospels and Epistles should be believed. And this was how the Apostles Creed was developed.

The Apostles Creed was used by adults when they were baptized, confirmed, and received their first Communion all on the same day. The creed insists that the God who created heaven and earth in the Old Testament is the same God who sent Jesus onto the earth. It insists that Jesus was human who was born, suffered, died on the cross, and was raised from the dead. And it insists that the church on earth is as important as heaven is.

History of the Nicene Creed:

In 313 AD, the Roman emperor Constantine made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire in hopes that Christians would bring more unity to the empire. But when Christians started publically proclaiming their faith, a schism was exposed in Christianity. Some Christians worshiped only God the Father; other Christians worshiped both the Father and Jesus as one and the same God; and other Christians worshiped the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the one God. As the divisions deepened, Emperor Constantine called together the Council of Nicaea in 25 AD to bring Christians together in compromise. They agreed on what books to us in their New Testament and they developed the Creed of Nicaea that used a compromised language that all factions mostly agreed with. But when Emperor Constantine died, the Christians stopped upholding that creed.

After Constantine died, two different emperors ruled over the two halves of the Roman Empire. A pagan emperor ruled the western half of the Empire that spoke Latin and allowed Christianity to be legal. Constantine's son ruled over the eastern half of the Empire that spoke Greek and had influence on the church in the eastern empire. Constantine's son favored the Christian faction that worshiped only God the Father and viewed the Son and Holy Spirit as creatures who represented the Father. St. Athanasius who insisted that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit should be worshipped as one God was banished from the church and forced to live in exile for contradicting the emperor of the eastern Roman Empire.

In 383 AD, Constantine's grandson was powerful enough to take over the throne over all of the Roman Empire and united it as one empire again. He established the Christian Church as the state religion of the Roman Empire and made all other religions illegal and punishable by death in the empire. He favored St. Athanasius' teachings about God and called together the Council of Constantinople that made the Nicene Creed. This creed to the phrases from the earlier Creed of Nicaea and made it to insist that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one and the same God.

History of the Athanasian Creed:

In the 400's AD, more questions arose about how it is that we speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit differently and yet they are one and the same. And questions arose about whether or not we worship Jesus only as God, but not as a human being. Ecumenical councils were held by the state church of the Roman Empire and a major difference between the teachings of the eastern and western churches emerged. In the 500's AD, the Athanasian Creed (named in honor of St. Athanasius) became the statement of faith upheld by the Roman Catholic Church (the state church of the western Roman Empire) and was rejected by the Byzantine Orthodox Church (the state church of the eastern Roman Empire). Eventually the pope in Rome ex-communicated the Patriarch in Constantinople and the Patriarch in Constantinople ex-communicated the Pope in Rome. Each of them accused the other as being heretic because of their teachings about the Holy Trinity.

The Athanasian Creed is the first Church document to ever use the word 'trinity' to describe God's nature and it is also the first Christian document to use the term 'person' to describe the unique identities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our Doctrine of the Holy Trinity comes from this creed and our Doctrine of the Dual Nature of Christ comes from this creed.

Conclude with the Prayer of the Day for Holy Trinity Sunday (p. 37, Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Augsburg Fortress; 2006):

God of heaven and earth, before the foundation of the universe and the beginning of time you are the triune God: Author of creation, eternal Word of salvation, life-giving Spirit of wisdom. Guide us to all truth by your Spirit, that we may proclaim all that Christ has revealed and rejoice in the glory he shares with us. Glory and praise to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.